



Clark on one of his runs during the First Order Chapter 2011.

Run and feel the Lord's pleasure

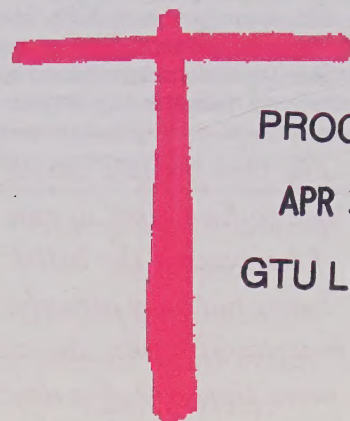
A testimonial by Clark Berge SSF

I am a reformed couch potato. Eight years ago I was on retreat, stretched out on a bed eating chocolate chip cookies, reading a book about connecting body, mind and spirit. Suddenly, I had a stomach ache. I realized all the theory in the world wasn't going to get me any closer to feeling the freedom, joy and integration I longed for. I would have to get off the

bed and move, if I ever hoped to integrate body, mind and spirit.

I chose running because it is absolutely free. I believed it was consistent with my vow of poverty and also I wouldn't have to ask permission for a gym membership, thus inviting fraternal jokes and unsought advice and interest. I wasn't sure how long I'd keep this up. The only expense was shoes, and here common sense was important. I took advice and aimed for "good enough": too cheap and I risked hurting myself, too expensive and I was told I'd be wasting my money.

However, regardless of the shoe, running required real effort, and my first efforts nearly did me in. One quarter mile and I was gasping frantically, heaving gobs of phlegm. I quickly realized my desire to integrate body, mind and spirit would be vanquished by premature fantasies of running a marathon. I adopted strict standards, running only short distances. "Gentle" was my watch word. At the first sign of any alarming twinge of pain, I walked. Within a year I could run a mile. But once that benchmark was achieved, it seemed it was only a matter of months before I could run six



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Health of body and mind

This summer, so the organisers of the London Olympics and Paralympics hope, Londoners, Britons and sports fans around the world will unite in a celebration of the feats of the human body, tuned to the peak of its God-given health and fitness. So we, too, turn our attention to questions of health and wholeness. A Brother testifies to the spiritual value of physical exercise; a doctor wonders what he would make of St Francis as his patient; a carer reminds us of the daily reality of loving and caring for those who lack the fullness of health we would all like to share in; and a local councillor draws our attention to health of the people of East London where the 2012 games will be centred.

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miles. The furthest I've ever run is fourteen miles; I normally prefer five to six. My goal is still the gold standard integration of body, mind and spirit, not a gold medal.

Running has helped me physically. I've lost some extra weight and lowered my blood pressure. I have more energy and stamina for the physical challenges of my life, and within a few months chronic lower back pain disappeared as I grew stronger. The endorphins released by the exercise only make the days brighter and

recommended keeping a daily chart of how I spent my time during the course of a day. I did this for several days and realized I had time for whatever I wanted to do. How badly did I want to run? I cut out some internet time; it gave me 45 minutes without sacrificing much in the way of communication.

The next mental hurdle was self-consciousness. I was convinced everybody was laughing at me - a middle aged man galumphing along the road. I learned that most people didn't even give me a second thought; those who did were astonished but encouraging. I wasn't as much at the centre of others' lives as I feared and hoped.

It is the spiritual connection that keeps me running. My Franciscan spirituality is deeply nourished by the regular contact with the sun and the wind, the rain and the cold. Nothing beats the smell of the damp earth or the salty tang of the air along the beach. I have had wonderful encounters with people all over the world - a naked child standing along the road at Maravovo in the Solomon Islands shouting delightedly "Maniswere!" Whiteman! "Hallo!" In Lesotho I looked around after passing a school yard to find a dozen children, appearing to be about six or seven years old, pounding along behind me, book bags bouncing on their backs. "Run! Run!" they laughed. I have running "friends" - solitary figures I pass frequently. Although we never break stride to get acquainted I count on seeing them. I meet up with friary neighbours all over the world, often stopping to pet their dogs or comment on the weather. I feel I belong to the scene, that I am connected to the people and the environment, my "Brother Sun" and "Mother Earth." As St. Francis taught, it all points to God "in whom we live and move and have our being."

Meditation literature often talks about different kinds of meditation: walking meditation on a labyrinth, kundalini meditation (which I experience as a joyful jiggling up and down - with apologies to practitioners), tai chi, Qigong - so why not running meditation? Combining the rhythms of running with breath control and mental focus I find healing in the exercise. This is especially true of anger. I run sprints until I'm limp. By then I am ready to surrender my will to God and ask that the log of self-righteousness be removed from my eyes. There is something about admitting "I can't go any further" on the



There's more than one way of getting about in the great outdoors.

road that helps me let go and rest myself in God's merciful presence. While running, scriptural passages surface which I repeat as mantras, drawing encouragement on the steep climbs or joyful release as I go downhill: "Alleluia!"

It is the spiritual connection that keeps me running.

My Franciscan spirituality is deeply nourished by the regular contact with the sun and the wind, the rain and the cold.

The great benefit of prayer is the sense of connection with God. Along with this, prayer helps me to feel awareness of myself and others, and the discovery of a spiritual life that nourishes humility, and the hope, idealism and tenacity to work for peace, justice and reconciliation, healing the environment. Running is a kind of prayer for me. *f*

Clark Berge SSF is Minister General of the First Order Brothers. His 'home friary' is at Mt Sinai, Long Island, New York State.

Opportunities for summer activities

Hilfield Families Camp

28 July-5 August 2012

Contact: Helen and Kelvin Inglis
01256 893 644 or h.inglis@tesco.net.

Hilfield Youth Camp

12-19 August 2012

Contact: Bob Bailey
bjbess@btinternet.com
Tel 078853 6932

Pilgrims of St Francis

International Pilgrimage: Germany, South Baden area, 1-9 August 2012

UK National Pilgrimage: Stamford to Peterborough, 18-25 August 2012

Contact: Caroline Hannah
caroline@bevertonco.com



A work in progress: the main arena at the Olympic Village, Stratford, London.



Francis: a word from the doctor

Simon Cocksedg TSSF

What would it have been like to be the family doctor for Francis of Assisi? How would you handle having responsibility for the health of a saint? I suspect it would be an interesting but demanding role. A place to start might be the World Health Organisation definition of health:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

We don't know much about Francis' childhood, but his teens might give his family doctor cause for concern. His continual rebelling might simply be boisterous teen antics but could he have a mental illness? He is reported as being immobile and in a trance, unresponsive to others, hearing voices, being drunk (with the spirit), and giving all his money and expensive equipment (armour) away in dramatic gestures. Certainly at that time, he might have been said to have a dysfunctional family - a loving mother but a domineering and often absent father, perhaps more concerned with business, image and power than with his family's needs.

If Francis attended the surgery, the writings suggest we would be struck not only by his indifference to his physical health, but also by his focus, inner determination and joy.

As Francis' GP, we might overlook teenage follies, but the events of the next few years shaped Francis' life for ever with consequent risks for his health. He started to nurse people with infectious diseases. He had no home and slept outside or in caves wearing inadequate old clothes. He became anxious; he seemed not to care if he became deformed or hunchbacked. He insisted on eating scraps or mixing ash with what little food he ate. Alongside his frequent strenuous physical exercise, this meant he lost weight. His activities led people to treat him badly, insulting or attacking him, or refusing him shelter.

All of which would undoubtedly concern his family doctor. But if Francis attended the surgery, the writings suggest we would be struck not only by his indifference to his physical health, but also by his focus, inner determination and joy. We might approvingly note his respect for authority, and his regular

routines and rule of prayer, worship and work. We would be encouraged that he had such good social support from his close friends, for whom he cared deeply.

Francis, like most men in mid-life, would have visited the doctor very infrequently. As time went on, our Umbrian GP would most likely observe this patient from afar, perhaps with a mixture of worry and pride: worry for Francis' persistent disregard for his own body and health, his lack of sleep, and the consequences of his insistence on a life of complete poverty (hunger, cold, poor accommodation); worry also at Francis' indifference to his own personal safety such as travelling on dangerous overseas journeys or going unprotected into a conflict zone; but pride at the effect of the actions of Francis and his followers on the health - physical, mental and social well-being - of the local community: healing illnesses, preaching a life-changing gospel, influencing people of power for good, caring for the sick and so on.

Like most of us, Francis needed clinicians towards the end of his life. He had eye disease, which they tried to help with the latest (ineffectual) treatments. The reluctance of the Stigmata wounds to heal would have defeated his nurses. He was in constant pain. And yet, from that time, we have evidence of great personal joy (the Canticle of the Sun), of concern for others (the Blessing for Brother Leo), and of acceptance ("whatever the Lord my God wishes ... I desire"; "welcome, Sister Death"). His death was similarly recorded as joyful and peaceful, listening to singing and reading, surrounded by people he loved.

Given the WHO definition, what can we learn from considering health in the life of Francis?

Most family doctors' advice for a healthy lifestyle centres on getting a good balance - moderate exercise, alongside moderate calorie and alcohol intake and so on. Francis was a man of extremes, single-minded in his pursuit of his bride, Lady Poverty. It is this single-mindedness which perhaps helps us to understand why Francis might not be an easy patient. The writings suggest he would smilingly and joyfully ignore advice based on moderation. Arguably, and paradoxically, that is both strength and weakness.

A weakness firstly because his repeated

abuse of Brother Body over the years led to pain and illness in his last years. Secondly because, as we have seen, clearly he was frequently not in a state of physical, social or mental well-being, as our definition demands.

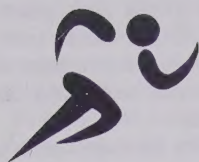
Was his disregard for his own health a strength? Yes, undoubtedly, in overcoming his own desires and self-will as part of his spiritual journey in following Jesus Christ. Yes, in his disregard of self in favour of others - loving service and humility being the result. Paradoxically, perhaps, not in ignoring Jesus' instruction to "love your neighbour as yourself".

Francis was a man of extremes, single-minded in his pursuit of his bride, Lady Poverty. It is this single-mindedness which perhaps helps us to understand why Francis might not be an easy patient.

Medical research tells us that religious belief is good for our health. Given Francis' lifestyle, single-mindedly aspiring to be a saint may not be a healthy choice. But in the example of his life, Francis challenges our contemporary conventional, moderate, carefully balanced definitions of health and well-being. In our earthly life, he seems to suggest, the only journey worth making, and the only health worth having, is spiritual. *f*



Dr Simon Cocksedg is a priest, tertiary and GP. He is the SSF Community Medical Advisor and the author of Francis of Assisi: Living Prayer Today in the Grove booklet Spirituality series.



The cost of caring

Sarah Akehurst TSSF

There are over 6 million unpaid carers in Britain today; about one in 10 people. They care for people who have physical and mental health problems and cannot manage without their help. I am going to reflect on the experience of being a carer and where we might find God in this experience. Where is the grace to tread this particular path with the humility, love and joy which characterised the life of Francis?

For some, caring may be something they do just for a short time. My focus is particularly on those carers who look after someone with a long term condition, where doing things with and for that person means giving a lot of time, and giving it over years rather than months. Being an unpaid carer is a role that is rarely chosen and is more often thrust

Being an unpaid carer is a role that is rarely chosen and is more often thrust upon people in consequence of the illness, accident or disability of a family member or the birth of a disabled child.

upon people in consequence of the illness, accident or disability of a family member or the birth of a disabled child. There is of course a choice in saying "yes" rather than "no"; however carers are often not prepared, equipped or supported to take on the practical and emotional load. There can be a great deal of loss involved for carers as their lives change, sometimes permanently, in ways they had not expected or wished for.

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not grow faint or weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

but those who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings
like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40.28-31

Saying "yes" may be something the carer is glad to do. Probably this is more likely if the relationship with the person who needs care is good, if the carer has support from family, friends and professionals, and if life remains materially comfortable. Having the right kind of temperament and having an end in sight both help. Unquestionably being a carer in the UK today is often hard. A survey of carers in Scotland entitled "Sick, tired and caring" (2011) looked at the impact of unpaid caring on health. Of the respondents, 96% said that caring had impacted negatively on their health; over a quarter saw their health as poor; over half experienced long term illness or disability and 86% suffered from stress, anxiety and depression. A third said they were exhausted and half felt isolated. A report from the Princess Royal Trust for Carers (2010), entitled "Broke and Broken" found that a third of carers do not want to wake up in the morning because of dire financial circumstances, half want to run away from their caring role. Turning to drugs and alcohol to cope, being fearful of the future and wanting to harm the person who is cared for, mainly out of frustration, are all reported as significant in research.

I have been a carer for the past thirteen years, for my mother and for my son. The role was one I had not anticipated nor one to which I am naturally well suited. I

enjoyed outdoor activities, especially hill walking, and also study and reading. I'd hoped to take an active role in the church or in the Third Order. In fact long walks, study and any kind of role outside of home and work have disappeared, and their place has been taken, much to my surprise, by chronic health problems and a very different kind of life.

Experience and research suggest then that, for a long term carer, staying well, happy and prosperous is rarely part of the package. Firstly, I think this is to do with the practical impact of

caring, the lack of time and opportunity to do the things that maintain health, wellbeing and a good standard of living. It's about not having support, and often not having financial resources either.

Secondly, there is the impact on mental health. The carer is likely to suffer with the person they are looking after, a person who may be in pain, who is

*The gift of life is always about the present.
If one is not dominated by fear of the future or sadness about the past there is more space to see Christ in everyday life, in those we care for, in the help that we receive and in the doorway open into the world of disability with all the potential that gives for friendship, understanding and service.*

experiencing loss, who may be fearful, sad or angry. Fighting to access help and support can be hugely frustrating. Also if the person who is cared for is excluded, for whatever reason, from normal social relationships, then the carer can easily be excluded too. In a society that applauds success, status and material prosperity, the carer may feel insignificant and alone. Being a carer can feel like participating in a giant game of snakes and ladders where the ladders go nowhere much and the snakes are everywhere. Everyday snakes of drabness, loneliness and misunderstanding and snakes that go all the way down: chronic illness, depression, broken relationships, poverty, debt and despair.

So where might God be found in this experience? Not necessarily in churches; they can be difficult places to take people who are disabled or ill, and it's hard to be part of a church community if you have no spare time. When I can I go to a Benedictine monastery near my home. At Vespers on Sunday the monks sing (in translation) "Let not the soul, weighed down with sin, be an exile from the gift of life". If "sin" in this context is all the mental and physical suffering that can go with being a carer, then the question is, what is this gift of life, how do we find it?

There is a story about one of the desert fathers which is relevant to this. A young monk seeks out a wise hermit and asks him which of three men is on the best path to achieve holiness. One has decided to

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serve God by giving away everything he owns and spending his life ministering to the poor. The second has decided to serve God by spending all his time in prayer and fasting. The third has become the servant of an old man who needs his help. The answer given is the third man as he has relinquished his will to that of another person. So giving up control over one's own life can be seen as a path on which the gift of life is to be found, a path of humble service. It's not about gritting your teeth, or about despairing; it's about being willing to take up this particular cross even if you don't make a great job of carrying it.

I see the giving up of one's will for another person as central to finding God in all of this; it really is a hard thing to do, and the cause of many painful emotions. Martin Laird in his book "Into the Silent Land" describes "afflictive emotions" such as fear, sadness, guilt, anger. If these emotions dominate our minds they can cause inner chaos, distort our view of

reality and undermine our health. For Christian carers they can prevent us from experiencing this "gift of life". For me the way to loosen their grip is mainly through contemplative prayer, using the Jesus prayer or something similar. That is not an easy answer because the poverty of time is real, and regular time is what is needed. But prayer reveals to us the possibility of our experience being transformed from the inside out. Martin Laird suggests that it is in our suffering, not in spite of it, that we find Christ. God in Christ has taken into Himself the brokenness of our human condition; hence what seems like a dead end can become a doorway. In silent prayer we find that doorway to the gift of life which is the presence of Christ, a presence more real and substantial than either the ladders or the snakes.

For me, places are important, they help. So going to Vespers and Benediction at the monastery mean being somewhere where prayer is possible. When I leave, nothing has materially changed; however, to echo Laird, whilst fear is still present I feel less afraid of fear, life will still be hard but I struggle less with that.

The gift of life is always about the present. If one is not dominated by fear of the future or sadness about the past there is more space to see Christ in everyday life, in those we care for, in the help that we receive and in the doorway open into the world of disability with all the potential that gives for friendship, understanding and service. It helps us to see that the rickety ladders and the frightening snakes are not the whole story; the fountain that is this gift of life is always flowing and irrigating our lives despite the hardship. It helps us be less harsh in our judgments of ourselves and others. And ultimately one hopes we may experience some of the joy and humility of Francis, finding in the path of being a carer the easy yoke that Christ speaks of, his hand upon our shoulder. *f*



Sarah Akehurst lives in the north of Scotland. She has three children, and is a Franciscan tertiary.

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to ensure career development of workers at Westfield.

If the criticism of the welfare state has been to encourage a cycle of dependency, we have sought to develop a 'virtuous circle' in which effort is rewarded. When the local authority seeks to help an individual or family there is a cost, as we do so as representatives of the wider community. We have begun to ask explicitly for some payback to that community in a voluntary capacity. This may range from sitting as a school governor to running a children's football club. What is reciprocated is not the most important thing. But the recognition that if my community helps me, I should help my community in some way, is. It is all part of an approach that is explicitly seeking to increase the personal, community and economic resilience of our borough and its people.

You may reasonably ask what this tour of a local authority's political initiatives has to do with health and I go back to the Black Report. The public health challenge for the twenty-first century is to stop some of the problems of relative affluence, 'downstream'. The NHS will continue to treat people's illnesses. The job for public health is to reduce the incidence of diseases that are avoidable, but which have so far proved impossible to eradicate. In part people have a responsibility for the decisions that they make, sometimes they also need the tools and the support of the community around them to do it. *f*



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The Olympics and health in East London

Clive Furness



The Olympic Games are coming to London. The stadium, the pool, the velodrome and the combat sports will all be in Newham. Newham is in east London. Historically part of Essex it is now firmly part of London's East End. For followers of popular soap operas, the Walford postal code, E20, will be the code for the new housing that will about the Olympic park.

It is by any measure one of the poorest parts of the UK. Every ward features in the poorest 20% and eight (out of 20) were in the poorest 5%. Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Newham is the second 'most deprived' borough in England.

As far as the Office of National Statistics (ONS) is concerned there are 239,000 people living here, this is important as it determines the level of central government funding received. Independent analysis commissioned by the borough suggests 299,000 and there are 357,000 people registered with local GPs.

Whilst we don't know the exact population, we do know that roughly 27% of households change during the course of a year. This is often the same people moving between properties in the borough, but includes people moving into the borough for the first time. We also have the youngest population in the country and, arguably, the most ethnically diverse. The average life expectancy is roughly 10 years less for Newham residents than the national average.

There is a trend in public health towards education and encouragement to change individual lifestyles. However, there is a clear correlation between poverty and

poor general health, even though the causative connection may be complex and vary for different conditions. Research that the borough has recently commissioned allows us to look at the health of our population down to ward level and this will become a tool that informs our decision making as the public health function returns to local authorities. We have clustered our wards into community forums and these show that the two with the highest health needs are Canning Town and Manor Park. Broadly speaking, Canning Town remains older and white, Manor Park is largely Asian; two very different places and populations and with markedly different health problems.

The Black Report, published in 1979 and promptly shelved by the incoming government of Mrs Thatcher, suggested that as much as 80% of health determinants were matters outside the scope of the NHS. Thus the value of work to mental health and to the aspirations and achievements of children is not a matter for healthcare, though of enormous importance to the health of the public. Poor housing is a matter peripheral to the NHS. The NHS may deal with the chronic problems associated with obesity, (e.g. diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases), but their prevention is not an issue for your local hospital.

It is tempting to suggest that the Olympics have given us a new vitality and sense of direction. They haven't. We welcome them and the once-in-a-lifetime excitement and opportunities they offer. But they will not make any difference to the long term health of our population. For us they form part of an ongoing struggle to improve the health and the wellbeing of a population that traditionally comes in poor and moves out as residents become richer.

In the mid-1970's the churches played an important part in slowing that drift. Men such as David Sheppard (at the Mayflower) and Colin Marchant (at West Ham Central Mission - now MCC)

encouraged Christians to put down roots in the East End and build communities as well as families. The local authority also is now trying to find ways to encourage people to stay.

Thus in housing, where roughly one third of the housing in the borough is privately rented, we have begun a registration scheme for private landlords to drive up the standards and eliminate over-occupancy; the largest number of people living in the same property so far has been 37. We propose to buy houses in the private sector which will be offered to people on regular but low incomes who wish to get a step onto the housing ladder. Unlike previous shared ownership schemes this will start with a contribution as little as 25% and perhaps lower, and instead of paying rent on the remainder the householder will be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the property.



Route 69 to Canning Town nears its terminus

We have driven up the education achievement levels consistently over the past 10 years, with very few children leaving without any GCSEs. The correlation is not so crass as to suggest that five GCSEs will overcome a package of disadvantage. But for most young people it will help them to get a step up to make their own way in the world.

Newham has some of the highest levels of benefit claims in the capital. A political decision was made to encourage work as the primary way out of poverty. We have some 18,000 adults who have never worked (or at least never paid income tax) and they and their families are clustered in social housing. We opened Workplace, which has found work for several thousand Newham residents. This was developed on the back of an ambitious regeneration programme, the most recent part being the new Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, close to the Olympic Park. In an exemplar of public and private sector co-operation some 1500 of the 4000 new jobs went to Newham residents. The council and Westfield have set up a retail academy to provide training at the pre-recruitment stage and

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Clive Furness has been councillor for Canning Town in Newham, since 1997. He holds the Health and Wellbeing portfolio for Newham as the Executive Member for Health. He is a Baptist and is secretary of the Memorial Community Church.

Minister's Letter

Brother Samuel, Minister Provincial of the First Order Brothers in the European Province, writes:

Dear Friends,

We're in a season of jubilees. Here in the UK the Queen's Diamond Jubilee is sparkling and is somehow caught up in the excitement of the impending London Olympics. In the European Province of SSF we've recently passed the 90th anniversary of the arrival of the first brothers at Flowers Farm, Hilfield, and are now into the 75th anniversary year of the establishment of SSF through the amalgamation of the Brotherhood of St Francis of Assisi (Douglas' lot) with the Christa Prema Seva Sangha (Algy's lot), and the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross (George Potter's lot) - not to mention those brothers who have recently celebrated 50th and 60th anniversaries of their profession in vows.

There've been many changes over the past fifty, sixty, seventy-five and ninety years - in religious life, in the Church and on the national and international scene. Perhaps the most significant of these is that we've become a much more culturally diverse society. When Elizabeth II acceded to the throne, the 'Windrush', the first of the boats bringing West Indian immigrants to the UK to run the trains and buses of London and other cities, had only recently docked at Southampton. Great Britain still considered herself to be a Great Power. The young Queen ruled over a very substantial Empire and we had just turned down the opportunity to become a founding member of the European Common Market. Europeans, after all, were

'foreigners'; we were better off on our own.

Today, sixty years on, things look and feel very different. The grandchildren of the 'Windrush' arrivals are now embedded into the life of our society and have been joined by millions from almost every country around the globe, bringing with them their customs, their music, their food, their religion, their language; London is arguably the most multicultural city in the world. The Empire may have gone, but it seems to have come back to live with us! And whatever is felt about the structures of the European Union, the fact is that, increasingly, we cross European and other borders to find work, partners, holidays or homes. The four novices who were clothed at Alnmouth in January come from Germany, Sweden, Romania and Lebanon - not an Englishman among them! We benefit from cultural diversity; it brings new life, new ideas and new perspectives.

Yet immigration is an increasingly 'hot' issue in our world. The brothers and sisters who live and work in Leeds, Leicester, Birmingham and the London borough of Newham know something of the fear and hostility often felt and expressed towards those who come as refugees from violence, oppression and persecution as well as towards those coming to escape poverty and seeking opportunity for a better life - the reasons why borders have always been crossed throughout history. At a conference at Alnmouth in January we shared our



experiences of living and working among immigrants, and we heard from some who had been through the often lengthy and frustrating process of seeking permission to stay in the UK. We recognised that if our Franciscan order here in the UK began in the 1920's as a movement providing hospitality, fraternity and rehabilitation for homeless men, our vocation today may well be to provide the same for those living here stateless and friendless, often under the radar of the immigration authorities.

A jubilee in the biblical tradition is an occasion for celebrating justice for the poor, freedom from oppression and the gift of hospitality. In a world where politicians and others often buy into people's fear of the outsider and claim to be 'cracking down' on illegal immigrants, we as Franciscans are committed to living the Jubilee and to sharing the vision of a multicultural society where the stranger becomes a friend.

Pax et bonum,

Samuel SSF

Theme Reflection



It is to be prayed that the mind be sound in a sound body.
 Ask for a brave soul that lacks the fear of death,
 which places the length of life ultimate among nature's blessings,
 which is able to bear whatever kind of sufferings,
 does not know anger, lusts for nothing and
 welcomes hardship and labour more than
 the satisfactions, feasts, and feather bed of an Eastern king.
 I will reveal what you are able to give yourself;
 For certain, the one footpath of a tranquil life lies through virtue.

The Roman Poet Juvenal

Translation (altered) from www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mens_sana_in_corpore_sano

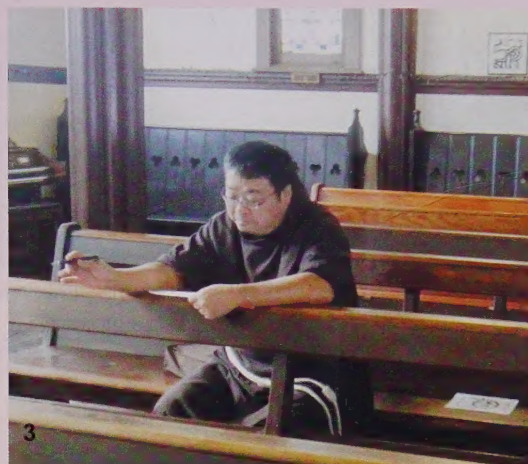
Looking in on the friars

Los Angeles, originally a Spanish foundation and now a metropolitan city, renowned for movie stars whose homes are in Hollywood, has hosted (1) an SSF friary since 2010. Spanish is still a significant language in this area of the city. (2) Thomas, the priest in charge of the Church of the Epiphany, blesses the food for the Epiphany Parish Picnic in the back yard of the friary. (3) Ambrose-Cristobal puts some finishing touches to his sermon, prior to the arrival of the congregation; he is also a student in a Clinical Pastoral Education course, (4) like his colleagues dressed in 'pastoral care' blue in preparation for visiting patients in the Hospital of the Good Samaritan. (5) Ivanildo also helps out with some parish activities. (6) Simon is an ordinand, shown here with some other students of the diocesan seminary.

Further north but still in California, when the brothers were too many for San Damiano Friary in San Francisco, some of them moved to Berkeley. Those now resident there are (7) Derek, and (8) Leo Anthony (with friends who had come to celebrate Derek's birthday). (9) Robert Hugh, who lives at San Damiano friary, visits occasionally (presiding in this photo). (10) A highlight of Derek's year was meeting Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, at a service for the Order of St John in San Francisco. After several years as Chaplain in San Francisco County Jail and Goldwater Hospital in New York, Derek was appointed a Chaplain of St John's Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, an honour bestowed by the Queen. He is only the second Franciscan in 800 years to be a Chaplain in the Order of St John.



L.A. and Berkeley



Community Routes

♦♦ Welcoming the stranger

John writes:

Four brothers and four sisters from around the Province joined the seven of us resident at Alnmouth early in January for a formation conference focusing on the plight of sanctuary seekers and refugees in Britain and exploring opportunities that we have to serve some of our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours. At our initial session we

were surprised at the breadth and depth of experience already accumulated in C/SSF. Lesley Dean-Stewart from a refugee agency based around the corner from the friary in Leeds helped us to construct an image in our mind's eye of a young Congolese 'everywoman' arriving in this country and the process of assessment, induction, dispersal or possible deportation that she would typically undergo. This was

complemented by **Kentigern John's** resumé of the history of legislation surrounding immigration and human rights, and accurate, recent statistics of the number of cases dealt with, including the country of origin of applicants, and outcomes.

We then had the privilege of listening to the horrendous accounts of two of those granted leave to remain in the UK. Grace, from Zimbabwe, was subjected to a ten-year wait for a decision from the Home Office, during which time she struggled to survive alone in precarious circumstances and retain a sense of her own human dignity. When asked what she would have most coveted from residents in this country, she replied "pure friendship".

Finally, following a screening of "Shooting Dogs", Ali told us his inspirational story of surviving the genocide, only to be tortured as a political prisoner in Rwanda. He also described some of the many atrocities he witnessed along the way. A speaker of nine languages, he now works with the West End Refugee Service in Newcastle in supporting their clients, many of whom suffer depression and mental illness because of the stress levels they endure daily for years on end, while awaiting a decision on their refugee application or because they are unable to find work commensurate with

their skills.

Together we identified a range of responses we aspire to make from our Franciscan community, notably offering non-judgmental hospitality in our houses and relationships even though it may pose some risk to our present way of being; building alliances to challenge systemic injustices; and, by way of advocacy, remaining conversant with the ever-evolving facts to effectively counter misinformed public opinion especially about sanctuary seekers and refugees.

♦♦ A truly European Province

There has been a real international flavour to Alnmouth in the past two years and brothers from America, Latvia, Mexico and Scotland - as well as England - have been resident at some stage in that period. The European dimension was further enhanced with the arrival of new postulants last September including two from Sweden, one from Germany and one from Romania, though the latter's later childhood and early adulthood in the Lebanon provides a further new cultural dimension. All four have now been admitted as novices (see Roundup). Hymns in Swedish and German have been gamely attempted by the English Anglophone brothers, and solo carols in those languages also



Kentigern John with Ali



David, Lesley and Hugh



Catherine and Barnabas Francis



Ken Norian TSSF, of the Province of the Americas, who took office as the Minister General of the Third Order in September 2011 (as noted in the previous issue of Community Routes).



Making saffron buns at Alnmouth for St Lucy's day.



St Lucy's Day procession: David, Robert, Micael Christoffer and Cristian Michael.

featured when the Friary led a local village carol service. Various national cuisines have been represented in meals in the refectory but a particular highlight was on St Lucy's Day, 13th December, when all four postulants as they then were contributed to a celebratory tea in full Swedish style. Saffron buns were baked and white robes and home-made hats were donned: the pointed ones most often worn by boys in Sweden represent St Stephen but it fell to the youngest, David, to represent Lucy with a red sash around his waist and a crown of live candles as they all processed into tea singing in Swedish and bearing the buns to grateful brothers and guests.

There is no particular connection between the original St Lucy and Sweden, but her name (like that of Clare) means 'light', hence the candles, and people in northern latitudes have an acute awareness of the value of light at midwinter. It used to be thought that 13th December was actually the darkest day of the year – just as 25th December and 6th January (Epiphany in the West) have all been regarded as the date of the Winter Solstice at some time in history.



Judith Ann, Maureen and Liz at Metherringham.

◆◆New work at Metherringham

On 20 February, **Liz** was licensed as Assistant Curate in the parishes of Metherringham with Dunston and Blankney and Branston with Nocton and Potterhanworth. She will work alongside the priest in charge and a team of retired clergy, with a focus on the spiritual nurture and pastoral care of the parishes. It is a part time post, and will enable her to continue to assist the other sisters at Metherringham with the ministry of hospitality and conducting retreats and quiet days.

◆◆Round up

Sue has been elected Minister Provincial for CSF in the European Province. She took office on 8 February. She and **Helen Julian** were blessed for their new ministries by the Bishop Protector at Evening Prayer, during the Sisters' Meeting at Hilfield, on 25 February.

Four postulants who had arrived at Alnmouth last September were admitted as novices on 11 January: Cristian Buliga, Micael Carlström, David Länström and Robert Ritter took the names respectively of **Cristian Michael**, **Micael Christoffer**, **David** and **Robert**. Catherine Wood, who lived in the Leicester and Metherringham houses during her postulancy, was admitted as a novice on 8 March, at Metherringham, taking the name **Catherine Iona**.

Peter has moved from Alnmouth to the

House of the Divine Compassion, Plaistow.

The **sisters in Gumi**, South Korea, have, after a long search, bought a house. Built in the traditional Korean style, it is in a village just outside the city of Gumi. Once some necessary renovation has taken place, the sisters will be able to leave the rented flats which have been their home since the community started, while continuing their work with the church and other projects in Gumi. **Sue** will be visiting Korea in May, so we hope to have some up to date pictures in the next issue of franciscan.

As *franciscan* went to press, the brothers in the European Province were in the process of electing a Minister Provincial to replace **Samuel** whose term of office ends at Pentecost 2012. *f*

Hilfield Friary 2012

12-13 May

Open Garden Day

19 May

Contemplative Prayer Day

25-27 May

Exploring creation weekend

2 June

Celebrating World Environment Day

★

24-29 July

A Working Week for Young People

15 September

Hilfield Stigmata Festival

12 noon Eucharist followed by an afternoon with the Hilfield Friary Community.

ending with tea and Evening Prayer (Please bring a packed lunch)

★

For further information and for other weekend and day events, see www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk

For bookings:

The Friary of St Francis, Hilfield, Dorchester DT2 7BE

Tel 01300 341 741

hilfieldssf@franciscans.org.uk



An English brother who has spent much of his Franciscan life in Papua New Guinea, **Andrew** now resides at the Hilfield friary. While in PNG he trained as a psychiatrist because he was concerned at the lack of care for people with mental health problems there. He travelled many miles on foot through the bush to attend to patients.

House up-date: Plaistow

From the house report, written October 2011

This morning a party banner, "Birthday Princess", festoons the front window of the house. A year ago, little Maria Alexandra was born. Mum and Dad, living at the house at the time, arrived street homeless, hoping to kick a drug habit. Mum was six months pregnant.

The family live now along the road, drug free, and supporting themselves with part-time employment.

Maria Alexandra's first birthday is a celebration of a big miracle. Thanks be to God.

Also at the birthday party is Brother Arnold, a brother for sixty years, and on 24 September, 2011 we gave thanks for him being a priest for fifty years. Indeed, we give thanks for him every day.

At the party is the household: ten adults and three children, who would otherwise be street homeless and destitute. The children are aged one, three and eleven. They have been refused help by the local authority, and have been sent to us from the police station.

Alongside the household is Brother Julian, and Jens, from Germany, volunteering with us for a 'gap year'.

Other volunteers and neighbours join in the party. We come from most corners of the earth.

Brother Vaughan has come to join us, in his third year of the novitiate. Much of his time is spent supporting people through some of the bureaucracy and processes associated with benefits, housing, citizenship and health. This often simply means sharing long periods in waiting rooms, writing letters, or making phone calls. One day a week he spends with the Franciscan Roman Catholic Brothers of the Renewal at their soup kitchen in Canning Town. Brother Peter joined us last December.

The house itself has been restored extensively by the stonemasons who care for the royal palaces, and redecorated by Jacek, now established in business, who lived in the house when



Recap: celebrating the centenary of Franciscans at 42 Balaam Street, in October, 2008

he was in extreme need.

Today is also the third anniversary of the blessing of the house, shared with the Archbishop of Canterbury. How blessed we are!

Donald, Edmund and Vaughan, while 'belonging' to the house at 42 Balaam Street, live round the corner in Crofton Road. The front garden patch there is now distinguished by a shed - the ramp a gift from Jacek; the stencilled rabbit from a passer-by. The shed houses Donald's new buggy. This transport has made him mobile again: Sundays on the bus to St Alban's, Ilford; round to Balaam Street and elsewhere on weekdays - a most practical solution. Old friends, ex-prisoners, even youth club members from St Philip's long ago: all show up from time to time. It was some fellow veterans from WWII in fact, who just at the right moment, encouraged Donald to apply to the Royal British Legion for an electric wheelchair, to which at once there was a warm response.

Stephen, the newly appointed Bishop for the Diocese of Chelmsford, home-grown, came by one day for Evensong at Balaam Street. He blamed Donald squarely for the whole thing. Donald tried to demur. But, "No, it really is your fault I'm here: you asked me on a mission to our parish if I'd ever thought of ministry."

Edmund wanders hopefully, occasionally still helping out at churches east and west of the Lee (which he appreciates a lot), and keeps in touch with a number of folk in need.

Mary Oliver's poem 'Praying' from a collection "Thirst" (in Poems, published by Beacon Press, Boston, 2006) captures the ethos of the house:

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

f.



Painted on the flank wall of the House of the Divine Compassion, birthplace of the Franciscan movement in the Anglican Church, this mural has greeted passers-by along Balaam Street for 25 years. Now removed, to allow repair to the wall itself, we give thanks that the vision of the picture is in large part realised in the house today.

Main roundel top left: that we can be a place of refuge - a safe harbour - to find opportunity to prepare for the next adventure on life's high seas.

Main roundel top right: That we can be a place where everyone's gift matters, as we help one another and our neighbours in need. Each person brings their special talent to life's market place, for exchange and mutual enrichment.

Main roundel bottom right: that the garden gives health, beauty and a constant remembrance of our relationship with all creatures, and with the whole creation, as celebrated by St Francis.

Main roundel bottom left: that we are called to live as one human family, in love and in peace, regardless of our colour, creed and country of origin.

AMERICAS

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Reviews



Malcolm Goldsmith
*In a strange land:
people with dementia and the
local church.*

ISBN: 9780 9530 4946 2

4M Publications 2004, £14.95

Malcolm Goldsmith wrote this book to affirm and to increase awareness that those with dementia are held within the love of God, and that it is part of the calling of the church to minister to these people and those who look after them with commitment and compassion. Indeed he suggests that this is one of the great tasks set before the church today. Goldsmith sets the scene by looking at what dementia is, what it feels like, and at the impact it has on family carers. He goes on to consider the response of the local church and reflects on the wider meaning of this for us as Christians.

Essentially this book was written for church leaders, to support them in this very difficult area of ministry, but with the hope that it would encourage those who care for people with dementia, and those who suffer from it.

Dementia simply means "out of one's mind"; this is the "strange land" of the title, and the link is made with Psalm 137. The Hebrews' feeling that they could not worship God in exile are compared to those suffering from dementia, experiencing all the dispossession and discontinuity that goes with that particular journey. As the Hebrews found that God was still with them in this strange land, so Goldsmith affirms that the person with dementia is not lost to God either. The hope, love, and practical care of a Christian community can demonstrate this by the way it sustains them and their families.

I did not find this an easy read, partly as the author draws on the work of so many other people; this enriches the book in some ways but also interrupts the flow of what is being said. As a long term carer for someone with dementia I found the book quite painful to read; for us it has not been possible to sustain a meaningful link with the Christian community but clearly having this could be a great source of support.

For me the value of this book is that it could be used by a church or Christian group to look at how they care for those with dementia and their families within their church/community. It has material in it which could be structured to use in a study day/short course, and could end, as Goldsmith suggests, with looking at how "dementia friendly" church is and what could be done. He writes thoughtfully on the value of listening, of visiting and keeping in touch with those who find it difficult to come to church and of offering practical support to carers. He highlights the importance of making links with nursing homes and using different forms

of service, for instance to mark a person's admission to a nursing home. None of these things is easy to do, and if they are not done, no one is likely to complain. However, as he says, this is not a one way process, and the life of congregations is hugely enriched by holding within them those who are not cognitively and behaviourally "normal". But that needs tolerance, understanding and imagination, and I would suggest needs to be embraced by groups of people in churches, not just ministers.

There is plenty to think about here; as Goldsmith says, if the church does not have good news for those with dementia, does it really have good news for anyone?

Sarah Akehurst TSSF



Chris Hudson
Who comes first?

ISBN 9780 8574 6048 6

BRF, 2011, £6.99

What are the Olympic and Paralympic games about? Their values are Friendship, Respect, Excellence, Determination, Inspiration, Courage and Equality and these were the ideals with which Pierre de Coubertin reinvented the Olympic Games. Later, the parallel Paralympic Games, inspired by the first Games for athletes with a disability held at Stoke Mandeville when London hosted the Olympics in 1948, espoused the same values. But are the Games really about this? This book is intended for use with ten year old school children and is one way to find an answer to that question with them. The stories could also be used with older people but probably a teacher would need you to ask other questions than those in the book and work with them in other ways.

In this book the reader meets some more or less famous Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games athletes. Stories about their participation in the Games and their lives before and/or afterwards provide seven short introductions to each one of the seven values of the games. With each story there is a suggestion of how to use the story and the different Olympic/Paralympic values in Religious Education and some other subjects. There are also some examples of how you can make School Assemblies with the Olympic and Paralympic Games as the theme.

For the best use of this book you should adapt each suggested lesson about one of the Olympic/Paralympic values to your own class or group or in other ways if you have a day or a whole week focussed entirely about the Olympic and Paralympic Games. As always you need to plan your lesson and probably you need to get more information for making that possible. The book gives examples of internet pages where you can find more information and some of these are suitable for use with the children. This book is a really good introduction to

discussing the Olympic/Paralympic values with children and hopefully through the discussions helps them see that sport is much more than just trying to be number one and winning the gold medal.

Micael Christoffer n/SSF

Prior to joining the First Order in September 2011, Brother Micael Cristoffer was employed as a pedagogue in the Church of Sweden.

Edward Howells & Peter Tyler (Eds)
*Sources of Transformation
Revitalising Christian Spirituality*

ISBN: 9781 4411 2575 0

**Continuum, London & NY, 2010, 203 pp,
£17.99**

This is a collection of essays which encourages us to look again at classical texts of Christian spirituality as a means of encouraging our own spiritual growth, our transformation into Christ which is our lifetime's work and will only be completed the other side of death, as Bernard McGinn, in the Preface, reminds us.

The essays in the first part range over topics such as the coming of the Holy Spirit in St Luke's gospel, an understanding of humans as 'imago Dei', reading as a transformative action, an overview of Anthony de Mello's teaching on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, and Moninne/Darerca (a fifth century Irish woman) as an example of a visionary woman of faith.

In the second part of the book, shorter essays discuss topics such as a short work by William of St Thierry, attitudes to the body in the fourteenth century with particular reference to the English mystics, the Carmelite Rule, and Teresa of Avila and 'Waiting for Godot' as a religious text. The poet Patrick Kavanagh is discussed as someone for whom the Incarnation was recognised in a multitude of ways, and the final two essays are based on transformation through the recovery of sexual integrity.

While some of the essays will appeal much more to those who engage in the study of spirituality as an academic subject, others will invite the reader to a reappraisal of their own experience of faith and what nourishes it. There is encouragement to read literature - classical and modern, religious and

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secular - as texts that can facilitate spiritual growth and to consider one's life experiences as vehicles for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into the people God calls us to be.

Maureen CSF

Martin Laird

A sunlit absence

silence, awareness and contemplation

ISBN: 9780 1953 7872 6

OUP, 2011, 192pp, £11.99

For people exploring contemplative prayer, one of the best books to read is Martin Laird's widely acclaimed *Into the Silent Land*. This new book is its sequel. Laird draws chiefly from the early centuries of the Church - writers such as Evagrius, Hesychios and Augustine - with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila providing a later framework. *A Sunlit Absence* goes further into some of the common problems or challenges of prayer: attachment to incessant thinking, boredom, and what he calls the 'creative disintegration' of depression. He also looks at some of the subtler battles with pride and vainglory, and offers advice on such practical matters as the use of icons, the role of intercession and, more prosaically, how to avoid falling asleep.

The style is more informal than his first book, with a greater (perhaps too great) use of case studies. Anyone who prays knows well enough their own pitfalls, and reading this will reveal a few more to look out for. However, the overall tone of the book is the calm reassurance that trials are a necessary part of the process. As he says on page 23: "...we do not have to flee from our life circumstances or from our thoughts and feelings (yet we are free to if common sense dictates). These thoughts and feelings are themselves porous to this spacious flow [of our being in awareness]; they, too, manifest the silence we seek..." If you have read *Into the Silent Land*, you will enjoy this sequel; if you haven't, read it now.

Nicholas Alan SSF

Laurence Freeman

First Sight: The Experience of Faith

ISBN 9781 4411 6157 4

Continuum, London, 2011, £10.99

First Sight has been called the 'sequel' to Fr Laurence Freeman's earlier book, *Jesus: The Teacher Within*, and the style and content of the two books are certainly closely connected. In both, Freeman's theology could most simply be called 'contemplative' and practice-based; his choice of sources normally tends towards the Church Mothers and Fathers; and his views on society owe much to the thought of Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher.

As the title suggests, *First Sight* is about faith. Freeman focuses on topics such as Lifestyle, Illumination, and Union, and links them with what it might mean to live as a person of faith. There is at all times an impressive momentum and vision

about Freeman's writings, and this book is no exception to the rule. There is also an abiding sense of story in this new book: the story of the stages of our faith; the story of Freeman's life, from his childhood to his current role as Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation; and also the story told to the reader by the book as a whole, which has something therapeutic, or formative, about it. I came away feeling as though my eyes had been opened a little bit.

Freeman is more of a well-digger than a system-builder. He looks deeply into issues in diverse areas rather than trying to build up a coherent theological whole. It is consequently with fresh springs of insight that the reader of *First Sight* is rewarded. The surprising number of typographical errors and some complex trains of thought are small hindrance to 144 pages of nourishing spiritual drink.

**Philip Seal,
Bristol**

Andrew D. Mayes

***Holy Land? : Challenging questions
from the biblical landscape***

ISBN: 9780 2810 6466 3

SPCK, 2011, 135pp, £9.99

The author, Andrew Mayes, is Advisor for Spirituality in the Diocese of Chichester, and has spent some years teaching at St George's College in Jerusalem. His knowledge of the Holy Land is first-hand and his comments are apt. He is also widely read and there are lots of quotations from the Fathers as well as from modern sources.

It is a book meant for those preparing to visit the Holy Land and can be used by individuals as well as groups. In the Holy Land one is confronted with the landscape, both physical and human, and with the landscape that each of us is as a person. The book is not an armchair travel book, showing us the places where Jesus was born or died or had this or that experience in between, but the query in the title gives an indication of what to expect: instead of speaking of "the Holy Land" we should perhaps refer to "the land of the Holy One".

The book is divided into twelve chapters, such as *The cave's questions: How can I face the darkness?* and *The Garden's questions: How can I embrace the struggle?* In each chapter one faces not only the physical reality of the 'outer landscape' but oneself, the 'inner landscape'. In between these there is the human landscape and one is made to think of the political and societal situation that constitutes the daily struggle of the people living there, against the backdrop of the seemingly irresolvable conflict between Jew and Palestinian. Considering the Sea of Galilee, we face the shortage of water as well as its spiritual connotations. The water from the lake is shared unequally between Jews and Palestinians (guess who gets the larger share?), and the questions that

follow ask us to consider sharing 'the cup of water', the water of the well in Samaria, and the sharing of faith with the spiritually hungry. Alas, there is no mention of the Golan Heights, the conquest of which by Israel deprived Syria from their share of the water of the Sea of Galilee.

The questions raised at the end of each chapter are challenging to the 'comfort' of our Christian faith. As such the book can be recommended for use by study groups, even if no trip to the Holy Land is in sight: the examples given help us understand better the issues involved. Of course it can be used by individuals, but left alone we do not easily leave our comfort zone. If you want a serious yet inspiring book for your next Lent group, get this one! You will learn a lot, not just about biblical times, about the Holy Land and about the Middle East situation, but about yourself and your Christianity.

Thomas Anthony SSF

Dennis J. Billy

Living in the Gap.

ISBN: 781565483927

**New City Press, Hyde Park, New
York, 2011, 109pp, £8.95**

Also available on kindle



The picture on the front cover is of a very high bridge over a large gap, making it appear extremely precarious. The book is primarily about members of religious communities, whom the author sees as responding to the vocation to live dangerously in the gap. The gap to which he refers is the gap between vision and reality.

There are some very searching questions, as for example when we are asked: "What would the world be like without your religious order?"

The author is a Redemptorist father, who has had a great deal of experience as a teacher. He draws heavily, as he himself acknowledges, on the writings of Pope John Paul II, and particularly on his *Vita Consecrata*. He calls for the working out of the monastic way of life in the modern world. He asserts that those living in community must keep before themselves the example of the one perfect community, which is the Holy Trinity.

While recognizing the differences between the various religious orders, he recalls St. Bernard's statement that we need each other for the good of the whole. There is need also for ecumenical dialogue, and particularly with the Orthodox Churches of the east, in view of their stress on holiness and contemplation.

For members of religious communities there is much food for thought in this book, which is simply and attractively written. But its readership should not be confined to community members, since we have here good teaching on the Christian life which is available to all. The universal call to holiness should affect us all, and this book could help us to realize the implications.

Martin SSF

60 years as a friar: Martin SSF

From a sermon preached by Samuel SSF on the occasion of Martin's diamond jubilee celebrations at St Peter's Church, London Docks, on 17 December 2011.

December 17th is the day in the Church's calendar known as O Sapientia. It refers to the first of the antiphons for the Magnificat which are said or sung in these last days before the feast of Christmas - all beginning with the cry "O", looking for the coming of the Lord, and starting today with the cry for Wisdom: "O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end of the earth to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things. Come and teach us the way of prudence".

I want to think for a few minutes about the wisdom of Martin's vocation, the wisdom which "sweetly orders all things" and which is "the way of prudence". In one sense the wisdom which is spoken of in the scriptures is very down-to-earth and practical. Wisdom teaches us to live well - to look after our bodies, to eat - not too much, to get enough sleep. She (and she is a lady) teaches us to nurture friendship, to avoid useless conflict, to speak the truth, to respect those in authority - but not to be over-awed by them - to value the institutions of family, of community, of nation. There's a homeliness in some of these wisdom sayings which we are all able to recognise and enjoy - "Better a pot of lentils than a rich meal cooked without love".

There are plenty of the signs of this sort of wisdom in the Martin whom we know and love. He's amazingly disciplined in his personal life, his community life and in his public life. If Martin says that he will do something, he does it. I don't know of anyone who answers letters, emails, or phone messages as promptly as Martin, or anyone as discreet or as loyal to the tradition - and all this is no unthinking routine for there's a faithfulness and a steadfastness in that orderliness (with

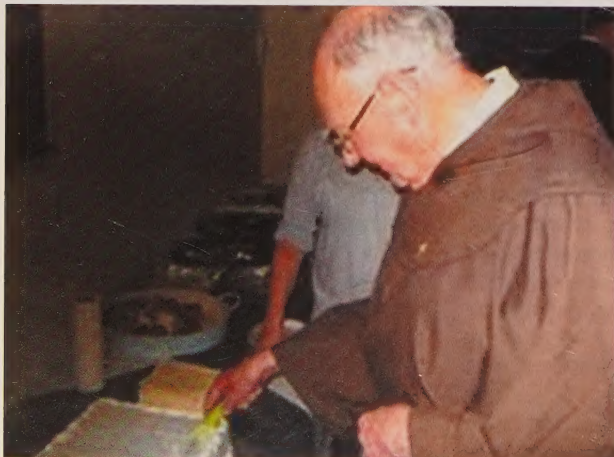
much fun and playfulness) which is the gift of holy wisdom. For all of this we give thanks to God today.

But also in the scriptures there's a deeper level or sense in which Wisdom is spoken of - and it's often in the form of a question: "Where is wisdom to be found?" You can search for wisdom high and low, say the scriptures, but she's harder to obtain than red gold. Wisdom is not learnt by rote and cannot, in fact, be possessed or held at all - for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and those who find her find life.'

*Wisdom teaches us
to live well,
to nurture friendship,
to avoid useless conflict,
to speak the truth,
to respect those in authority,
to value the institutions
of family, of community,
of nation.*

Where is wisdom to be found? That's the question which lies at the heart of Martin's vocation as a Franciscan friar. The search for the wisdom which is the fear of the Lord has been central to Martin's vocation over the past sixty years. In fact, I would say that that search for wisdom which is the fear of the Lord is at the heart of all vocation - Franciscan, Christian and human - the seeking after God in all things and above all things, the persistent and steadfast search for God, day by day, through good times and bad, through light and darkness. This is what the sixty years we are celebrating today are fundamentally about.

During this time he has lived through/survived the leadership of every Minister of the Society from Douglas through to the present day, six all told, and before long he'll be experiencing another. I first met Martin when I was a sixteen year old schoolboy, when he had already been in the order for fifteen years. He has been vicar of three parishes and priest-in-charge of another. Three times he has been a school chaplain and twice the chaplain of a hospice. Chapter member, Provincial Secretary, Engagements



Martin cutting the celebratory cake after the liturgy to mark the 60th anniversary of his profession in vows.

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Secretary, retreat giver, mission leader, teacher, school governor, hymn-writer - he has done all this, and remarkably he goes on; in his latter eighties he's amazingly active, particularly here at St Peter's. I know how much he's valued here, but I also know how much he values being involved with the ministry of this parish, and I want to thank Fr Jones and all you who are parishioners for your generous hosting of this celebration today when we give thanks to God for sixty years of faithful vocation lived by Martin in response to the everlasting faithfulness of God.

Where is wisdom to be found? In the world in which we find ourselves today that's no mere academic debate, but an increasingly urgent question. Amidst the crass stupidity which has brought about the economic and financial mess we are in; within the unthinking idiocy of the exploitation and abuse of God's creation; as part of the utter foolishness of allowing ourselves to be consumed by consumerism; involved in the recklessness of wars which bring destruction and death; complicit in the lunacy which neglects human life and justice for the poor - for us the question of where true wisdom is to be found is a matter of life and death. Martin made his choice to set out on that search sixty and more years ago, and he renewed his commitment to it last night before his Minister in the chapel at St Mary's Vicarage in Plaistow.

Our search for wisdom which is the fear of the Lord brings us back to today's gospel reading. St Matthew's genealogy reminds us that God in his wisdom has been searching for us through many generations - calling us, saving us, redeeming us from slavery, and, through it all, being patient with us. God is a God who persists with us, loving us with a steadfast love - until, when the time is right he comes among us, foolishly weak and vulnerable as a newborn child.

*O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver
The hope of the nations and their
saviour,*

Come and save us, O Lord our God. f